THE LONE WOLF

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

SYNOPSIS.

—3—

At Troyon's, a Paris inn, the youth Marcel Troyon, afterwards to be known as Michael Lanyard, is caught stealing by Burke, an expert thief, who takes the boy with him to America and makes of him a finished cracksman. After stealing the Omber jewels and the Huysman war plans in London Lanyard returns to Troyon's for the first time in many years because he thinks Roddy, a Scotland Yard man, is on his trail. On arrival he finds Roddy already installed as a guest. At dinner a conversation between Comte de Morbihan, M. Bannon and Mlle. Bannon about the Lone Wolf, a celebrated crackaman who works alone, puzzles and alarms him as to whether his identity is only guessed or known. To satisfy himself that Roddy is not watching him, Lanyard dresses and goes out, leaving Roddy apparently asleep and snoring in the next room.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

A single half-power electric bulb now modified the gloom of the hallway; its fellow made a light blot on the darkness of the courtyard. Even the windows of the conciergerie were black.

None the less Lanyard tapped them smartly.

"Cordon!" he demanded in a strident voice—"Cordon, s'il vous plait!"

"Eh?" A startled grunt from within the lodge was barely audible. Then the latch clicked loudly at the end of the passageway.

Groping his way in the direction of this last sound, Lanyard found the small side door ajar. He opened it and hesitated a moment, looking out as though questioning the weather; simultaneously his deft fingers wedged the latch back with a thin slip of steel.

It had, in fact, not been raining within an hour, but still the sky was dense with a low, sullen wrack of cloud, and still the sidewalks were inky-wet.

The street was lonely and indifferently lighted, but a swift, searching reconnoissance discovered no spy skulking in the shelter of any of the nearer shadows.

Stepping out, he slammed the door and strode briskly round the corner, as if making for the cab rank that lines up along the Luxembourg gardens of the Rue de Medicis; his bootheels made cheerful racket in that quiet hour; he was quite audibly going away from Troyon's.

But instead of holding on to the cab rank, he turned the next corner, and then the next, rounding the block; and presently, reapproaching the entrance to Troyon's, paused in the recess of a dark doorway and, lifting one foot after another, slipped rubber pads over his heels. Thereafter his progress was practically noiseless.

The smaller door yielded to his touch without a murmur. Inside, he closed it gently and stood a moment listening with all his senses—not with his ears alone, but with every nerve and fiber of his being—with imagination to boot. But there was not a sound or movement in all the house that he could detect.

And no shadow could have made less noise than he, slipping cat-footed across the courtyard and up the stairs, avoiding with superdeveloped sensitiveness every lift that might have complained beneath his tread. In a trice he was again in a corridor leading to his bedchamber.

It was quite as gloomy and empty as it had been five minutes ago, yet with a difference, a something in its atmosphere that made him nod briefly in confirmation of that suspicion which had brought him back so stealthily.

For one thing, Roddy had stopped snoring. And Lanyard smiled over the thought that the man from Scotland Yard might profitably have copied that trick of poor Bourke's, of snoring like the Seven Sleepers when most completely awake.

It was, naturally, no surprise to find his bedchamber door unlocked and slightly ajar. Lanyard made sure of his automatic, strode into the room, and shut the door quietly, but by no means soundlessly.

He had left the shades down and the hangings drawn at both windows; and since these had not been disturbed something nearly approaching complete darkness reigned in the room. But though promptly on entering his fingers had closed upon the wall switch near the door, he refrained from turning up the lights immediately, with a fancy, of impish inspiration, that it would be amusing to learn what move Roddy would make when the tension became too much even for his trained nerves.

Several seconds passed without the least sound disturbing the stillness.

Lanyard himself grew a little impatient when his sight didn't become accustomed to the darkness because it was too absolute—it pressed against his staring eyeballs like a black fluid, impenetrably opaque, as unbroken as the hush within that room.

Still he waited. Surely Roddy wouldn't be able much longer to endure such suspense.

And, surely enough, the silence was abruptly broken by a strange and moving sound, a hushed cry of alarm that was half a moan and half a sob.

Lanyard himself was startled, for that was never Roddy's voice!

There was a noise of muffled and confused footsteps, as though someone had started in panic for the door, then stopped in terror.

Words followed—the strangest he could have imagined—words spoken in a gentle and tremulous voice:

"In pity's name! who are you and what do you want?"

Thunderstruck, Lanyard switched on the lights.

At a distance of some six paces he saw not Roddy but a woman, and not a woman merely, but the girl he had met in the restaurant.

CHAPTER V.

Anticlimax.

The surprise was complete; but it's a question which party thereto was the more affected.

Lanyard stared with the eyes of stupefaction, his jaw slack. To his fancy, this thing passed the compass of simple incredulity—it wasn't merely improbable, it was preposterous; it was anticlimax exaggerated to the proportion of the grotesque.

He had come prepared to surprise and bullyrag the most astute police detective of whom he had any knowledge; he found himself surprised and discountenanced by this!

Confusion no less intense informed the girl's expression; her eyes were fixed to his with a look of blank inquiry; her face, whose coloring had won his admiration two hours since was now colorless; her lips were just ajar; the fingers of one hand touched her cheek, indenting it.

The other hand caught up before her the long skirts of a pretty robe de chambre, beneath whose edge was visible a hand's breadth of shimmering white silk, with the toe of a silken mule to match the dressing gown. Thus she stood, poised for flight, attired only in a negligee over what, one couldn't help suspecting, was her nightdress—her hair was down, she was unquestionably all ready for her bed.

But Bourke's long and patient training had been wasted if this man proved one to remain long at loss. Rallying his wits quickly, he made a brave show of accepting this amazing accident as a commonplace.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Bannon—" he began with a formal bow.

She interrupted with a gasp of wondering recognition. "Mr. Lanyard!"

He inclined his head a second time: "Sorry to disturb you—"

"But I don't understand—"

"Unfortunately," he proceeded smoothly, "I forgot something when I went out and had to come back for it."

"But—but—"

"Yes?"

Suddenly her gaze for the first time broke from his and swept the room with a glance of wild dismay.

"This room," she breathed—"I don't know it—"

"It is mine."

"Yours! But—"

"That is how I happened to—interrupt you."

The girl shrank back a pace—two paces—uttering in low-toned mono-

He Saw Not Roddy, but a Woman.

syllable of understanding, an "Oh!" abruptly gasped. Simultaneously her face and throat flamed scarlet with the color that flooded them.

"Your room, Mr. Lanyard!"

Her tone was so convincing in its modulation of shame and horror that his heart misgave him. Not that alone, but the girl was very good to look upon.

"I'm sure," he began soothingly, "it doesn't matter. You mistook one door for the—"

"But you don't understand!" She shuddered. "This dreadful habit! And I was hoping I had outgrown it! How can I explain?"

"Believe me, Miss Bannon, you need explain nothing."

"But I must. I wish to. I couldn't bear to have you think— But surely you can make allowances for sleepwalking!"

To this appeal he could at first return nothing more intelligent than a dazed repetition of the term.

So that was how— Why hadn't he thought of it before? Ever since he had turned on the lights he had been subjectively busy trying to invest her presence there with some plausible excuse. But somnambulism had never once entered his mind. And in his stupidity, at pains though he had been to render his words inoffensive in themselves, he had been guilty of constructive incivility.

In his turn Lanyard colored warmly.

"I beg your pardon," he muttered.

The girl paid no attention; she was thinking only of herself and the anomalous position into which her infirmity had tricked her. When she did speak her words ran swiftly:

You see— I was so frightened! I found myself suddenly standing up in darkness, just as if I had jumped out of bed in my sleep at some alarm; and then I heard somebody enter the room and shut the door stealthily. Oh, please understand me!"

"But I do, Miss Bannon—quite."

"I am so ashamed—"

"Please don't consider it that way."

"But now that you know—you don't think—"

"My dear Miss Bannon!"

"But it must be so hard to credit! Why, it's more than a year since it last happened. Of course, as a child, it was almost a habit; they had to watch me all the time. Once— But that doesn't matter. I am so sorry!"

"You really mustn't worry," Lanyard insisted. "It's all quite natural—such things do happen—are happening all the time—"

"But I don't want you—"

"I am nobody, Miss Bannon. Besides, I sha'n't mention the matter to a soul. And if ever I am fortunate enough to meet you again, I shall have forgotten it completely—believe me."

There was convincing sincerity in his tone. The girl looked down, as though abashed.

"You are very good," she murmured, moving toward the door.

"I am very fortunate."

Her glance of surprise was question enough.

"To be able to treasure this much of your confidence," he responded with a tentative smile.

She was near the door; he opened it for her, but cautioned her with a gesture and a whispered word: "Wait. I'll make sure nobody's about."

He stepped noiselessly into the hall and paused an instant, looking keenly right and left, listening.

The girl advanced to the threshold and there halted, hesitant, eying him anxiously.

He nodded reassurance: "All right—coast's clear!"

But she delayed one moment more.

"It's you who are mistaken," she whispered, flushing again beneath his regard, from which admiration could not be absent. "It is I who am fortunate—to have met a—gentleman."

Her diffident smile, together with the candor of her eyes, embarrassed him in such degree that for the moment he was unable to frame a reply

"Good night," she whispered—"and thank you, thank you!"

Her room was at the far end of the corridor. She gained its threshold in one swift dash, noiseless save for the silken whisper of her garments, turned, flashed him a final look that left him with the thought that novelists did not always exaggerate, that eyes could shine like stars.

Her door closed softly.

Lanyard shook his head, as if to dissipate a swarm of pestering thoughts, and went back into his own bedchamber.

He was quite content with the explanation the girl had given, but as the victim of a methodical and pertinacious habit of mind, spent five busy minutes exnmining his room and all that it contained with a perseverance that would have done credit to a Frenchman searching for a mislaid son.

If pressed, he would have been put to it to name what he sought or thought to find. What he did find was that nothing had been tampered with, and nothing more—not even so much as a dainty, lace-trimmed wisp of sheer linen bearing the lady's monogram and exhaling a faint but individual perfume.

Which, when he came to consider it, seemed hardly playing the game by the book.

As for Roddy, Lanyard wasted several minutes, now and again, listening attentively at the communicating door; but if the detective had stopped snoring, his respiration was clear enough in that quiet hour, a sound of harsh monotony.

True, that proved nothing; but Lanyard, after the fiasco of his first attempt to catch his enemy awake, was no more disposed to be hypercritical; he had his fill of being ingenious and profound. And when presently he again left Troyon's—this time without troubling the rest of the concierge—it was with the reflection that, if Roddy were really playing possum, he was welcome to whatever he could find in the quarters of Michael Lanyard.

CHAPTER VI.

The Pack Gives Tongue.

Lanyard's first destination was that convenient little ground-floor apartment near the Trocadero, at the junction of the Rue Roget and the Avenue de l'Alma; but his way thither was so roundabout that the best part of an hour was required for what might have been less than a twenty-minute taxicab course direct from Troyon's. It was past one when he arrived, afoot, at the corner.

Not that he grudged the time, for in Lanyard's esteem Bourke's epigram had come to have the weight and force of an axiom: "The more trouble you make for yourself, the less the dear public will make for you."

Paradoxically, he hadn't the least intention of attempting to deceive anybody as to his permanent address in Paris, where Michael Lanyard, connoisseur of fine paintings, was a figure too conspicuous to permit of his making a secret of his residence. De Morbihan, moreover, through recognizing him at Troyon's, had rendered it impossible for Lanyard to adopt a nom de guerre there, even had he thought such course advisable.

But he had certain matters to attend to before dawn, affairs demanding privacy; and while by no means sure he was followed, one can seldom be sure of anything, especially in Paris, where nothing is impossible; and it seemed as well to lose a hypothetical spy first as last. And his mind would not be at ease with respect to Roddy, thanks to De Morbihan's gasconade in the hearing of the detective, and also to that hint which the count had dropped concerning a fatal blunder in the course of Lanyard's British campaign.

He fitted key to latch and quietly let himself into his flat by a private entrance from the street, the possession of which, in addition to the usual door opening on the court and under the eye of the concierge, distinguished this from the ordinary Parisian apartment and rendered it doubly suited to the adventurer's uses.

Then he turned on the lights and moved quickly from room to room of the three comprising his quarters, with comprehensive glances reviewing their condition.

But, indeed, he hadn't left the reception hall for the salon without feeling assured that things were in no respect as they ought to be—a hat he had left on the hall-rack had been moved to another peg; a chair had been shifted six inches from its ordained position, and the door of a clothes closet, which he had locked on leaving, now stood an inch ajar.

The state of the salon, which he had furnished as a lounge and study, and of the tiny dining room and the bedchamber adjoining, bore out these testimonies to the fact that alien hands had thoroughly ransacked the apartment, leaving no square inch unscrutinized.

Yet he missed nothing. His rooms were a private gallery of valuable paintings and antique furniture to poison with envy the mind of any collector, and housed into the bargain a small museum of rare books, manuscripts, and minor articles of exquisite workmanship whose individuality, aside from intrinsic worth, rendered them priceless. A burglar of discrimination could have carried away in one coat pocket loot enough to foot the bill for twelve months of profligate living. But nothing had been removed—nothing, at least, that was apparent in the first tour of inspection; which, if sweeping, was in no way superficial. He moved slowly from object to object, checking off items and noting their condition, with the sole result of justifying his first impression—whereas nothing had escaped handling, nothing had been removed.

As a last test he opened his desk—of which the lock proved to have been deftly picked—drew up a chair, and went through its pigeonholes. His scanty correspondence, composed chiefly of letters exchanged with art dealers, had been scrutinized and replaced carelessly, in disorder—and here again he missed nothing; but in the end, removing a small drawer and inserting a hand in the recess, he found and pressed a spring which released a rack of pigeonholes and exposed the secret cabinet which forms an inevitable attribute of such pieces of period furniture.

A shallow box, this secret space contained one thing only, but that one of considerable value, being the leather bill-fold in which the adventurer kept a store of ready money against emergencies.

It was mostly for this, indeed, that he had come to his apartment; his London campaign having demanded an expenditure far beyond his calculations, so that he had landed in Paris with less than one hundred francs in pocket. And Lanyard, for all his pride of spirit, acknowledged one haunting fear, that of finding himself strapped in time of stress

The fold yielded up its hoard to a sou—Lanyard removed and counted over five notes of one thousand francs and ten of twenty pounds—their sum approximating two thousand dollars.

But if nothing had been taken away, something had been added—the back of one of the Bank of England notes had been used as a blank for a memorandum.

Lanyard spread it out and studied it attentively.

The handwriting had been traced with no discernible attempt at disguise, but was quite strange to him. The pen employed had been one of those needle-pointed nibs so popular in France; the hand was that of an educated Frenchman. The substance of the memorandum translated as follows:

"To the Lone Wolf—The Pack sends greetings and extends its invitation to participate in the benefits of its fraternity. One awaits him always at l'Abbaye Theleme."

A date was added, the date of that same day.

Deliberately, when he had conned this communication, Lanyard produced his cigarette case, twisted the note of twenty pounds into a rude spill, set it afire, lighted his cigarette therefrom and, rising, conveyed the burning paper to a cold and empty fireplace, where he permitted it to burn to a crisp, black ash.

When this was done his smile broke through his clouding scowl.

"Well, my friend!" he informed the author of that document which now could never prove incriminating—"at all events, I have you to thank for a

Lanyard Studied It Attentively.

new sensation. It has long been my ambition to feel warranted in lighting a cigarette with a twenty-pound note, if the whim ever seized me!"

His smile faded slowly; the frown replaced it—something more valuable to him than a hundred dollars had just gone up in smoke.

CHAPTER VII.

Suspense.

His secret uncovered, all that laboriously constructed edifice of art and chicane which yesterday had seemed so impregnable a wall between the Lone Wolf and the world today torn asunder, Lanyard wasted time neither in profitless lamentation or any other sort of repining.

Delaying only long enough to revise plans, he put out the lights and left by the courtyard door; for it was just possible that those whose sardonic whim it had been to name themselves "the Pack" might have stationed agents in the street to follow their dissocial brother in crime. And now, more than ever, Lanyard was firmly bent on going his own way unwatched.

His course first led him stealthily past the door of the porter and across the court to the public hallway in the main body of the building

Afoot, and in complete darkness, he made his ascent of five flights of winding stairs, pausing at length before the door of an apartment on the sixth floor. A flash from a pocket-lamp located the keyhole; the key turned without a sound; the door swung on silent hinges.

Once inside, the adventurer moved more freely, with less precaution against noise. He was on known ground, and alone; the apartment, though furnished, was untenanted, and would so remain as long as Lanyard continued to pay the rent from London under an assumed name.

It was the convenience of this refuge and avenue of retreat, indeed, that had dictated his choice of this particular floor, for the sixth-story flat had one invaluable feature—a window opening on the roof of the adjoining building.

Two minutes' examination sufficed to convince Lanyard that here at least the Pack had not trespassed.

Five minutes later he picked the common lock of a door opening from the roof of an apartment house on the farthest corner of the block, found his way downstairs, knocked on the door of the porter's lodge, chanted that venerable open sesame of Paris, "Cordon, s'il vous plait!" and was made free of the street by a worthy concierge too sleepy to challenge the late-departing guest.

He walked three blocks, picked up a taxicab, and in ten minutes more was at the ample, open and unguarded porte-cochere of a roomy court walled with beetling, ancient tenements.

Assuring himself that the courtyard was deserted, Lanyard addressed himself to a door on the right; to his knock it swung promptly ajar with a click of its latch. At the same time the adventurer produced from beneath his cloak a small black velvet vizor and adjusted it to mask the upper portion of his face. Then, entering a narrow and odorous corridor, whose obscurity was only emphasized by a lonely, guttering candle, he turned the knob of the first door and walked into a small, ill-furnished room.

A spare-bodied young man, who had been sitting at a desk, reading by the light of an oil lamp with a heavy green shade, rose and bowed courteously.

"Good morning, monsieur," he said with the cordiality of one who greets an acquaintance of old standing. "Be seated," he added, indicating an armchair beside the desk. "It is some time since I have had the honor of a call from monsieur."

"That is so," Lanyard admitted, sitting down.

The young man followed suit. The lamplight, striking across his face beneath the greenish penumbra of the shade, discovered a countenance of Hebraic cast.

"Monsieur has something to show me, eh?"

"But naturally."

Lanyard's reply just escaped a flavor of curtness—as who should say, "What did you expect?" He was puzzled by something strange and new in the attitude of this young man, a trace of reserve and constraint.

They had been meeting in this manner for several years, conducting their secret and lawless business according to a formula invented by Bourke and religiously observed by Lanyard. A note or telegram of innocent superficial intent, addressed to a certain member of a leading firm of jewelers in Amsterdam, was the invariable signal for meetings such as this, which were always held in the same place, at an indeterminate hour after midnight, between this intelligent, cultivated and well-mannered young Jew and the thief in his mask.

Why, then, this sudden awkwardness and embarrassment on the part of the agent?

Lanyard's eyes narrowed with suspicion.

In silence he produced a jewel case of morocco leather and gave it to the Jew, then settled back in his chair, his attitude one of lounging, but his mind as uneasy with distrust as his fingers which, under cover of his cloak, rested close to the pocket containing his automatic.

Accepting the box with a little bow, the Jew pressed the catch and uncovered its contents. But the richness of the treasure thus disclosed did not seem to surprise him; and, indeed, he had more than once been introduced with no more formality to plunder of greater value. Fitting a jeweler's magnifying-glass to his eye, he picked up one after another of the pieces and examined them under the lamplight. Presently he replaced the last and shut down the cover of the box.

He turned a thoughtful countenance to Lanyard, made as if to speak, but hesitated.

"Well?" the adventurer demanded impatiently.

"This, I take it," said the Jew absently, tapping the box, "is the jewelry of Mme. Omber."

"I took it," Lanyard retorted good-humoredly—"not to put too fine a point upon it!"

The Jew shrugged, and with the tips of his fingers gently pushed the box toward his customer.

"This makes me very unhappy," he admitted; "but I have no choice in the matter, monsieur. As the agent of my principals, I am instructed to refuse you an offer for these valuables."

"Why?"

Again the shrug, accompanied by a deprecatory grimace: "That is difficult to say. No explanation was made me. My instructions were merely to keep this appointment as usual, but to advise you that it would be impossible for my principals to continue their relations with you as long as your affairs remained in their present status."

"Their present status?" Lanyard repeated. "What does that mean?"

"I cannot say, monsieur. I can only repeat that which was said to me."

After a moment Lanyard rose, took the box and replaced it in his pocket.

"Very well," he said quietly. "Your principals, of course, understand that this action on their part definitely ends our relations rather than merely interrupts them at their whim?"

"I am desolated, monsieur, but—one must assume that they have considered everything. You understand, it is a matter in which I am wholly without discretion, I trust?"

"Oh, quite!" Lanyard assented carelessly. He held out his hand. "Good-by, my friend."

The Jew shook hands warmly.

"Good night, monsieur—and the best of luck!"

There was a significance in his last words that Lanyard did not trouble to analyze. Beyond doubt the man knew more than he dared admit. And the adventurer told himself he could shrewdly surmise most of that which the other had felt constrained to leave unspoken.

Pressure from some quarter had been brought to bear upon that eminently respectable firm of jewel merchants in Amsterdam to force them to discontinue their clandestine relations with the Lone Wolf, profitable though these must have been.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Quaker Wit

"Somewhere in France" there is at work a group of English Quakers, whose cool courage and tireless devotion in rescuing and tending the wounded on many a battlefield have won them, despite their peace principles, the hearty respect and liking of both "Tommies" and "pious-pious." Among them is one young man whose ancestors for several generations have been notable more for wit and spirit than for the virtues oftenest associated with drab coats and broad hat brims.

It was a member of that family, a century or more ago, that found himself by chance in a carriage with a very fine lady attired in the low-necked, short-sleeved muslin dress then in the height of fashion, adorned by a profusion of jewels and trinkets, and protected only by a lace shawl as light as a cobweb. A chilly wind blew up suddenly, and she exclaimed, shivering, "What shall I do to get warm?"

"I really don't know," said the Quaker, sympathetically, "unless thee put on another breastpin."—Youth's Companion.

Deliver Us!

George W. Perkins, in a Y. M. C. A. address on temperance in Chicago, began:

"A corking time is a good time for any young man, but may heaven deliver us all from the kind of corking time that means an uncorking one."

Gifts of Winter

"In giving winter to men," said the Old Year, Margaret Woodward writes in the Countryside Magazine, "I am conferring upon them one of the greatest benefits. Do not the wise ones of earth know that climate has much to do with culture? that the degree to which a race acquires civilization is dependent upon it? Nowhere are the rigors of winter felt more severely than in New England, and mark you the men of intellectual and moral fiber who have been bred in this climate. Look at the races who bask under a tropical sun, where orange and banana groves grow luxuriantly, and notice the indolence, the sensuality, the lack of ambition which prevail. It takes the winter to tone up the moral and intellectual, as well as the physical nature of man. One of your philosophers never uttered a truer word than this: 'Wherever snow falls, there is usually civil freedom.' Winter should bring to a man a period of restfulness; it should afford him quiet hours in the library and opportunity for social intercourse."

Explained.

"Farm products cost more than they used to." "Yes," replied the farmer. "When a farmer is supposed to know the botanical name of what he's raising, and the zoological name of the insect that eats it, and the chemical name of what will kill it, somebody's got to pay."

For Protection of Hen.

The school commissioner of Caldwell, N. J., caused so much comment by leaving an open umbrella on his front lawn for many days that he finally had to explain that it was a protection for his strong-minded hen, who was sitting out there, and not at all amenable to suggestions that she move.

Seemed Longer.

"How long has Colonel Bluegrass been in the city?"

"Oh, about a week."

"Why, he talked to me as if he had been here at least six months."

"You forget. This town is 'dry.'"

Weary Willie in 1916.

"I just made t'ree resolution fur 1916, an' goin' to keep every one of them."

"Ye ain't resolved to go to work, hev ye, Bill?"

"No. My resolutions are dese: In 1916 I ain't goin' to drink champagne, take milk baths or put up at de Waldorf-Castoria when I'm in New York."

Instructors often most need instruction.